

*The Death of Keejgo at Gull Lake*¹

*There is no marriage, nor any compromise between White and Indian nations
except those that end in tragedy and the First Nations are thus doomed to extinction.*

*The great red-skinned villain, Tabashaw,² chief of the Saulteaux/Chippewa of Pembina,
was a favorite son of Ais-ainse³ - a British Ojibwe chief of Red River and Spirit Lake
(Devil's Lake) (where he was later killed with his people by savage Dakota warriors).*

*One dark night, a ghostly visitor appeared to Tabashaw, giving him a writing
by virtue of which he could procure anything he wanted whenever it wanting.
Thus, he learned the White man's secret of making hot buttered rum and iron arrowheads...
gaining his independence from the European traders who controlled the trade in furs.
The spirit came to him when he was setting his beaver traps all alone in the woods;
it wore a linen shirt and a dirty jacket, breeches and stockings and buckled shoes.
It called him comrade and they sat down to a long formal conversation on mankind.*

*Indians are wrong in addressing the sun for favours and protection from the wind
of changes now blowing our native heritage and culture away and wild storming
whilst people feast and make ceremonies, instead of preparing for war, and pretending
that nothing is wrong with the way things are now that the White man had come amongst the tribes.
The spectre said that the sun had no power over people but only moved across
the land and the water beyond the clouds above the sky and was apt to set each night,
leaving all cloaked in cold darkness like a daily prophecy of our dangerous plight.
Shaymanitou knows all, every heart and the secret thoughts of the whole world - everyone.
The sun was soon to set forever for all the Indian people as the Whites came.*

*Tabashaw gave the ghost newly made moccasins as its shoes were worn out beyond repair.
The traders treat you ill..., it saith. Give back the medals which they have bought your favour).
When did our people need their liquor, ammunition or rope tobacco before they came
to trade for furs and blanket our wives and daughters, siring their illegitimate
bastard half-breed mudling race and thus weakening our pure national identity.
Then they sat together in silence smoking their pipes, thinking of how things used to be.
Shadows danced as firelight flickered and somewhere an owl sang - and the coals slowly died.
In the morn, Tabashaw checked his traps... and found them all set off and every stake pulled up.*

¹ *At Gull Lake: August 1810* (written in 1934) from *The Green Cloister* by Duncan Campbell Scott; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1935. Scott was Canadian Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932.

² Tabashaw had once stabbed **Missistaygouine**, a close relative, six times in the breast and side... every stab sinking deep, up to the hilt. It was a long-lingering pain-filled death.

³ Throughout the history of the Turtle Mountain Band there have been three men named **Chief Little Shell**. They were also called **Aisainse of Little Clam**: This poem concerns **Tabashaw** son of Chief Ais-ainse (Little Shell I) of Pembina chief of the Saulteaux at Gull Lake (SK). In 1807-08, **Little Shell I** attempted to lead his followers to his ancestral residence at **Man-e-to Sah-gi-e-gun** (Spirit Lake, presently Devil's Lake). This party all met their deaths on the prairies at the hands of the Dakota. In 1808, Aisainse was one of the most influential Chippewa chiefs of nascent Pembina.

He knew then the Saulteaux would never recover their lost authority to the Whites.

Keejgo daughter of a Normandy hunter named Launay and an Oshawan woman of the Saulteaux was a powerful animal, wounded and trapped by forbidden love, such that her abject unreasoning passions were impossible to deny her mind's lust.

She was the third wife of Tabashaw... but, a loose woman torn apart by self-loathing. Keejgo was gifted with a great natural intelligence... yet unable to make the transition between the wilds and civilization - at home in neither world. Keejgo - with the blood of two races rushing through her veins - long longed for a better life; but was caught and torn between two worlds and unable to find peace in either... White or savage. She oft had prophetic premonitions of love and of the dual nature of beauty - hot cravings for firewater and sexual relations with the White fur trader which led to the tragedy of her living death and ostracizement by her family.

Thus she fell in love with Nairne of the Orkneys, a White trader, whom she thought would set her free.

Troubled by fugitive visions the half-breed girl sat down in the close dark outside his tipi, caught between the two worlds... unable to find peace in either of these two realms. Offering her frustrated love, in body and spirit, haunted by sounds of dreams unheard, longing for a better life than the savagery which she was born into and full of hopes Nairne would take her away from lonely foreboding wilderness to the land of the Whites. She was quite beautiful and always fabulously attired, carefully dressed for love, the contents of her mind tumbling off her tongue as she sang adulterous love for Nairne. But, being too afraid of the Chief's fearsome wrath, Nairne refused her song's soft flirtation.

"Drive this bitch back to her cuckold man," the greedy trapper cried as windrush and lightning

She with her love's supplications were driven away from Nairne's tent down a path by the lake. The impracticality of her love's courtship with Nairne released a storm of grief. During a hush before the storm came in breathless air sneaked under shuddering shadows, quiet walked through a knoll knotted with popular trees stripped of leaves dancing in the storm, the damp sedge and dewy grass at the edge of the shallow lake mirroring the rising sun. Thus, passing reeds as grey as ashes on the shore of the death-black water of Gull Lake, walking o'er gay spangles of flowers, fluttering of colour, caught up in the wonder of dawn's warmth rising bright - a gentle-glowing prairie lily - full of beauty and peace; her heart was passionate and pure as snow was her devotion to Nairne who drove her off. A massive storm darkened the rolling prairie sky, painting the woods with light ochre streaks... roaring double-flashes of lightning tinged her beautiful face with hope and innocence.

Ultimately she was rejected by both worlds... attaining peace only in her death. Her sordid-innocence and torrid-devotion was unjustly spurned and punished brutally: when jealous Tabashaw¹ discovered sweet Keejgo's betrayal, he punished her in rage,

¹ In 1807, while avenging the death of his eldest son, Tabashaw, his mother and son were all killed by a scalp-hunting Sioux war-party of about 200 wild-whooping painted warriors in a bloody life-or-death fight at Grande Fourches... in a camp on the plains at Grosse Isle at Folle Avoine (Wild Rice River). The

mutilating the girl - snatching an orange-glowing branch from his camp-fire's embers, he scarred her pale soft cheeks to destroy her beauty in fiery fury and blinded her terrified dark eyes with the flame as he screamed out: "Now take that face to your White lover." Brave Keejgo made no sound as her flesh was cruelly singed or when her eyes popped and bled pus. Then, his old wives caught her and 'pon she trod, casting her forever out of their lives, savagely throwing her body into the cold water like a dead dog so she'd drown... e'er so slowly; and her soul left her flesh to unite with the star of the morning (which she had been named). Her barbarous face was streaked by the beauty of her terror - outshining the pale moon, the rising sun and the rainbow reflecting on the dark-mirror of the lake's white-capped surface.



Sioux went on to fight another battle near Rivière de L'Aile du Corbeau (Crow Wing River) in Minnesota in 1808.